

Leading a Small Group Discussion

1. Prepare

Work through the materials and think yourself into your group meeting.

2. Pray

Pray before your group meeting.

3. Don't talk too much

Your job is to get people thinking and talking and keep the discussion moving from member to member rather than talking to the members.

4. Be A Good Listener

So simple yet so hard to do. Don't just listen to what people are saying – actively listen. The best leaders listen with their eyes and ears.

4. Don't Answer Your Own Questions

The whole purpose of asking the question is to create an environment where group members feel safe to share. It's not about getting the right answer. When people are silent with some of these questions, embrace the silence: this might be where the introverts are thinking and the Holy Spirit is speaking!

5. Encourage Responses

If no one really speaks you could say something like, "Paul, you look like you were going to say something..."

6. Ask Open-Ended Questions

Open-ended questions help group members to say more than a simple yes or no. Use 'what?' or 'how?' questions to get people to open up.

7. Try To Involve Everyone

Your group might be too big if everyone isn't able to speak their thoughts. Groups of over eight members will have difficulty doing this. In those cases, it might be best to divide the group into smaller groups for some of the time.

8. Keep the Main Thing, the Main Thing!

Remember, the focus is not on getting through the material and you may not cover all the questions. If the discussion is fruitful then allow group members the time they need to discuss, process, and grow with the information.

9. Manage the Time

Keep an eye on the clock. Don't let things get bogged down in interesting but irrelevant discussion. Bring things back on track and take the initiative to move things on when it feels right.

10. Leave time for application.

Make sure people have time to think about the difference that this discussion will have in their daily 'frontline' lives.



Discussion Guides for Small Groups

The Prophets: 5. Giving & Receiving Prophecy

WAY IN

This is the last session in this short series on prophecy. As a group agree on a one-sentence definition of prophecy.

Read: 1 Thessalonians 5:19-20

Key Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:20

Do not treat prophecies with contempt.

DISCUSS

1. One reason for the Thessalonians' treating prophecies with contempt may have been because some of the prophecies had been unhelpful and inaccurate.
 - a. Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5. What false prophecy had been given and how might this have bought the gift of prophecy into disrepute?
 - b. What is Paul's answer to dealing with such false prophecy (2 Thess.2:5)? How might this apply today?
2. What other reasons might there be today for people in churches 'despising' the gift of prophecy? For each

reason that you can think of, discuss a possible solution.

3. What is the effect of despising prophecy (see v.19)?
 - a. How do group members respond to the idea that we can extinguish God's work amongst us by our attitudes to his gifts?
 - b. How would a church know if it had 'quenched' the Holy Spirit?
4. Prophecy is not just to be received, because as we have seen, prophets can make mistakes! What is the correct response to prophetic words and pictures? (v 21a and see too 1 Corinthians 14:29).
 - a. What clues do these passages give as to what to look for in a genuine prophecy:
 - Deuteronomy 13:1-4
 - 1 Corinthians 12:7
 - Matthew 7:15-17
 - Deuteronomy 18:21-23
 - b. What other tests might we use to assess the validity of a prophetic word?
5. The Bible's advice is to hold onto good prophecy but avoid 'evil' prophecies (v21,22). (An 'evil' prophecy is one that does not come from God's Holy Spirit).

- a. Imagine you heard a prophetic word in a meeting and felt it was for you. How would you 'hold onto it'?
- b. Imagine a prophecy word was spoken for a church. How would the church 'hold onto it'?

WAY OUT

Spend some time in silence, or in worship (maybe listening to a worship song). Encourage people to listen in their spirits for God's nudges to share words, Scriptures or pictures with the group.

Commentary Notes:

The closest Paul comes to defining "prophecy" is in 1 Corinthians 14. Apparently "it consisted of spontaneous, Spirit-inspired, intelligible messages, orally delivered in the gathered assembly, intended for the edification or encouragement of the people," by men or women (1 Cor. 11:4–5) who remained "in control" of the activity.¹⁴ Although there seem to have been some who spoke this way more often than others, who were thus called "prophets," it appears to have been an activity potentially open to everyone (cf. Joel 2:28–30; Acts 2:17–18). There is no evidence that such utterances were ever given the same authority as inspired texts (i.e., Scripture)... Prophecy seems to have been a familiar aspect of the Spirit's activity in early Christian congregations. Do not, writes Paul, quench the Spirit by treating prophetic utterances with contempt. The proper solution to the problem of potential abuse is not to throw out the baby with the bath water; it is instead to "test everything" (5:21a). Paul strikes a careful balance here: "Because such utterances are from the Holy Spirit, they must not be 'despised'; but also because such utterances come through merely human vessels," they are not to be accepted blindly just because someone claims to have the Spirit.¹⁶ The proper course is to "test" them, in the sense of examining or investigating something with regard to its trustworthiness or genuineness (cf. Luke 14:19; also 1 Thess. 2:4 above).

Holmes, Michael W.. 1 and 2 Thessalonians: The NIV Application Commentary from Biblical Text to Contemporary Life . Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.